

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL CALGARY

AMCONSUL HALIFAX

AMCONSUL MONTREAL

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SUBJ: WESTERN PREMIERS REJECT ECONOMIC TIES WITH QUEBEC

REF: OTTAWA 3073

1. SUMMARY. CANADA'S FOUR WESTERN PREMIERS HAVE REJECTED OUTRIGHT ANY FORM OF ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH A SEPARATE QUEBEC. AT SAME TIME, THEY STRONGLY OPPOSED MAINTAINING STATUS QUO, AND CALLED FOR NEW ARRANGEMENTS UNDER CONFEDERATION. END SUMMARY.

2. MEETING IN BRANDON, MANITOBA MAY 5-6, PREMIERS BENNETT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, LOUGHEED OF ALBERTA, BLAKENEY OF SASKATCHEWAN, AND SCHREYER OF MANITOBA WASTED LITTLE TIME IN VOICING THEIR STRONG OPPOSITION TO AN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH AN INDEPENDENT QUEBEC. FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT END OF FIRST DAY (MAY 5):

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-- "THE WESTERN PREMIERS REJECT BOTH THE STATUS QUO AND QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE FOLLOWED BY AN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA -- THE SO-CALLED SOVEREIGNTY OPTION -- CONSIDERING NEITHER TO BE A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR SOLVING THE PROBLEMS CURRENTLY CONFRONTING THE FEDERAL SYSTEM."

-- "THE STRENGTH OF CANADA AND THE RATIONALE FOR CANADA IS FOUNDED

UPON EACH OF THE REGIONS COMPLEMENTING ONE ANOTHER AND BALANCING WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS. THESE CONDITIONS CHANGE OVER TIME, AND SACRIFICES ARE INVOLVED BUT THE COMMITMENT TO ONE COUNTRY IS ESSENTIAL IF THE BENEFITS OF CONFEDERATION ARE TO ENDURE OVER TIME AND THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES."

-- "WHILE ALL PROVINCES AND REGIONS HAVE EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS AND GREIVANCES WITH THE FEDERAL SYSTEM, THE WESTERN PREMIERS BELIEVE THAT THE VALUES, BENEFITS AND POTENTIALS OF CONFEDERATION FAR OUTWEIGH THE CURRENT DISADVANTAGES."

3. MAKING CLEAR THEIR OPPOSITION TO PARTI QUEBECOIS SEPARATIST AIMS, THE PREMIERS SAID THEY WILL COOPERATE WITH QUEBEC ONLY ON MATTERS OF A STRICTLY GOVERNMENTAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE NATURE. HOWEVER, AT PRESS CONFERENCE, ALL FOUR PREMIERS DENIED THEY HAD TAKEN A HARDLINE APPROACH TO QUEBEC. BENNETT DESCRIBED THE POSITION AS BEING SIMPLY "VERY PRO-CANADIAN". SCHREYER SAID IT ONLY EXPRESSED THE "REALITY OF OUR VIEW". BLAKENEY TERMED QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE WITH ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION AS "NOT PRATICABLE", AND PREDICTED IT WILL NOT HAPPEN. SAYING IT IS IMPORTANT FOR QUEBEC TO KNOW EARLY IN THE GAME WHERE THE WEST STANDS WITH REGARD TO ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION, LOUGHEED EMPHASIZED THAT THE WEST IS EQUALLY OPPOSED TO MAINTAINING THE CURRENT ARRANGEMENT UNDER CONFEDERATION.

4. CITING A WHOLE SERIES OF WHAT THEY SEE AS FEDERAL INTRUSIONS INTO PROVINCIAL MATTERS, THE WESTERN PREMIERS ALSO CALLED FOR A CLEARER DEFINITION OF THE DIVISION OF POWERS. THEIR COMPLAINTS WERE BASED ON A VOLUMINOUS TASK FORCE REPORT COMMISSIONED

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AT LAST YEAR'S CONFERENCE WHICH LISTED FEDERAL INTRUSIONS IN POLICY AREAS SUCH AS: CONSUMER AFFAIRS, RESOURCES, HOUSING, LAND USE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNICATION, MANPOWER, AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

5. OTHER TOPICS ON MAY 5 AGENDA WERE COORDINATED ACTION TO DEAL WITH POSSIBLE PRAIRIE DROUGHT AND INTERPROVINCIAL COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH. IN FIRST INSTANCE, IDEA OF CONFAB MAY HAVE DONE SOME GOOD AS LARGE PART OF MANITOBA HAD UPWARDS OF TWO INCHES OF RAIN ON EVE OF CONFERENCE. TRANSPORTATION MATTERS INCLUDING EXAMINATION OF HALL COMMISSION STUDIES WERE ON AGENDA FOR MAY 6.

6. COMMENT. WITH THEIR JOINT COMMUNIQUE AND FLAT REJECTION OF CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH AN INDEPENDENT QUEBEC, THE WESTERN PREMIERS HAVE CLOSED RANKS WITH ONTARIO PREMIER DAVIS WHO HAS TAKEN SIMILAR LINE WITHIN RECENT WEEKS. THUS, TRUDEAU'S FEDERALIST FORCES SEEM TO HAVE BEEN NOTABLY SUCCESSFUL IN LETTING THE PQ LEADERS KNOW THAT THE "SOVEREIGNTY OPTION" WILL NOT WASH WITH QUEBEC'S TRADING PARTNERS TO THE WEST.

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